

Sindiopa iwe

(A night mask from the Salima area)

Themes

- 1) Wisdom
- 2) Witchcraft
- 3) Witchcraft harms the practitioner (*choipa chitsata mwini*)
- 4) Witchcraft & old age

Etymology

Sindiopa iwe means, 'I do not fear you.'



Description

This elaborate head cover is made of maize husks to which an extremely long tail is attached. The dancer also wears a short kilt, leglets and armbands. He walks solemnly to show his importance and carries a stick, implying that he is approaching old age. He quietly, simply, parades in the arena without dancing or rushing. The character is only used for night performances and his message is not linked to any specific ritual.

For the Chewa, a person who grows in age should also grow in wisdom and in obedience to the ancestors' advice. It is believed, however, that senior people may dream of controlling other family members by using medicine and witchcraft. It is also taken for granted that old people prolong their own life span at the expense of the younger generation by resorting to witchcraft. **Sindiopa iwe's** song says, "(The one who says,) *Have you seen the horn (evil medicine)? is crippled by it.*" The Chewa believe that people who learn and practice witchcraft become its victims. They first develop physical malformations such as growing a tail and eventually die. This character of old, rarely danced today, stresses that the one who says, "I do not fear witchcraft," one day will perish by it.

www.kasiyamaliro.org

Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Parish, P. O. Box 41, Mtakatika, Malawi

Song

“Waiona nyanga! Waiona nyanga de (2x) yampundula!”

Source

Interview in 1992